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ABSTRACT

Counseling and human services in the 1990s will be different from counseling today. Among the changes to be expected will be a shift of emphasis from a client specialty focus to a focus on life decisions and planning; from a traditional case load approach to a demand for high output and performance; and from a professional services orientation to a market forces orientation. In addition, credentials and training will give way to demonstrated high performance as the chief criterion for hiring. Marketing concepts can aid counselors in identifying the public's needs and desires for counseling services. Counselors should recognize the life cycles of their products and services and adapt accordingly. A number of forces are competing with counseling services today: self-help books, self-help networks, other helping services entering the field and technologically-based services. Human services professionals should follow these recommendations: (1) use marketing strategies to locate potential users and to promote and assess services; (2) make effective use of new technology; (3) make a commitment to research and development; and (4) phase out ineffective services. (ABL)

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Garry R. Walz

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THE MARKETING OF COUNSELING

by

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NEW WAYS TO STRENGTHEN GUIDANCE AND THE HUMAN SERVICES: THE HUMAN SERVICES SPECIALIST AS MARKETEER

If you were to look at the want ads in the 1990s, you might find one like the following:

> **WANTED**
>
> Competent & interpersonally skilled persons who can help clients make career & life decisions & prepare for significant life transitions.
>
> Must be committed to excellence & high output, responsive to market forces, & able to work effectively with all age ranges & with individuals, families & work groups.
>
> Previous training and/or experience not important if demonstrated performance is high.

Several aspects of this want ad deserve comment. First, you will note, the immediate emphasis on persons who are "competent and interpersonally skilled." Right from the beginning, it appears there is a major interest in and concern for persons who are able to demonstrate requisite skills. Second, the focus is clearly not on individual areas of client need, e.g., personal counseling or academic advising, but rather on the broad dimension of helping individuals make important career and life decisions and prepare to respond to significant life transitions. Third, a focus on performance rather than the role of a counselor is clearly present. Unlike many ads that we see today, excellence and high output, as well as a responsiveness to market forces, are all emphasized. Note, too, the broad adaptability of this person in being able to work with a wide range of persons both as individuals and in families and work groups. Fourth, perhaps surprisingly by current standards for such a position, previous training and/or experience, is identified as "not important." Implicit in this statement is the notion that the employer is not interested in how skills are acquired, but is very concerned that the person demonstrate, in a wide variety of situations with different clients, the

ability to bring about the change and improvement to which the counseling service is committed.

The point here is that this hypothetical ad may foreshadow the changes and emphases which will characterize counseling and human services in the 1990s. This may evoke surprise, even vigorous challenges from some, because the picture painted by this ad is different from, even in opposition to, current trends within the counseling and human services field.

As the accompanying chart suggests (Figure I), a number of new emphases and foci are likely to characterize counseling and human services specialists of the 1990s.

Figure I

Changes in Counseling Program Emphases

Future	Present
1. Focus on life decisions and planning.	1. Client specialty focus.
2. Demand for high counselor output and performance.	2. Traditional case load approach to performance
3. A market forces orientation.	3. A professional service orientation.
4. Work effectively with individuals and groups of all ages.	4. Work with individuals of specified age range.
5. Credentials, training and experience unimportant if demonstrated performance is high.	5. Credentials and training a prerequisite to hiring.
6. Emphasis on excellence and all-around high performance.	6. Emphasis on carrying out professional responsibilities.

Some may review this list and say that such changes are neither desirable or inevitable, or even likely to occur—that the profession has the power to determine its own future. I would suggest there is another point of view, namely, that the viable growth services of the future will be those that respond to the marketing forces shaping our society and the lives of all of us. The impact of these forces is evident all around us. Doctors and lawyers regularly advertise their services, although many of the professional associations which represent them have steadfastly resisted this change. Colleges are actively involved in promoting their desirability and aggressively pursuing new student groups. Diversification, active and comprehensively designed marketing campaigns, and a wide variety of business procedures and methods are becoming more commonplace among professions that previously prided themselves on the absence of anything that smacked of "commercialism" or "advertising."

While it is very clear that much that of what we would describe as marketing is inappropriate to the helping services, there are basic concepts in marketing which deserve greater attention and interest from human services specialists. This is especially true as the competition for available resources becomes increasingly intense. The services which best understand and utilize market forces and strategies are those that will prosper and, in the long term, be the most viable in providing assistance to our society and to individuals. There is a generally shared feeling, frequently voiced with tinges of frustration by educators and practitioners in the human services, that a general malaise exists within counseling and the helping services that "counseling isn't what it used to be." In many ways, this expression of concern over the present state of counseling is a tacit admission that counseling and the human services are out of touch with their potential user publics, and that we are no longer able to clearly identify what our publics need or want or how to respond to them. A central premise of this paper is that there are marketing concepts which will help to identify strategies and procedures that will improve the type and quality of services presently provided, as well as identify new user groups.

Product and Service Life Cycle

Basic to marketing is the concept that every product or service progresses through a predictable life cycle of introduction to abandonment. Regardless of the

length of the life cycle, the stages are the same. Some products or services have a very short life (e.g., pet rocks); others become virtual staples in the market (e.g., men's white shirts). The specific stages of this life cycle are as follows:

Stage One: Introduction. In this stage, the product is new and has few competitors. The role of marketing at this point is to build demand by informing potential users of the existence of the product or service and to make them aware of its desirable attributes. This is an exciting period when the new item can catch people's fancy and quickly snowball in terms of their interests and positive response.

Stage Two: Growth. In the growth stage, there is a shift from building mass demand for the product by showing that it exists to stimulating selective demand. With the entry of competition through the introduction of similar products and services, it is important to stimulate selective demand—i.e., to identify and communicate why a given product or service is best and will most effectively meet a user's need and interest.

Stage Three: Maturity. In this stage, the competition becomes very strong. The sale and/or use of one product or service is usually won at the expense of another as the overall level of sales is stabilized. In this phase the marketing decisions become more competitive, and it is very important to stress the differences between products/services and the ways they may be used or experienced. In particular, it is important to stimulate further response to the product or service by identifying new users for it.

Stage Four: Decline. In the decline stage, there is a reduction in the use of the product or service. However, the costs remain high, particularly because of the intense competitive effort that is still required. There is also a negative generalization of effect where the one declining product/service affects others with its undesirability. Frequently in this stage, technology is responsible for introducing new products and the new then drives out the old. The key decision at this point is to abandon the product or service, since attempts to retain or re-develop it can be extremely expensive and detrimental to the overall effectiveness of the producing organization.

Major Challenges in the Service Life Cycle Concept

If we adopt the life cycle concept in our view of products and services, there are two specific challenges to which we should respond. First, it is apparent that each life cycle stage requires a different marketing strategy; i.e., the means of presenting the product or service to the public must be adapted. What will work effectively when first introduced, in the excitement and interest of the earliest identification of the product's potentials, is very different from what is needed when the product is in either a growth or maturity stage, when there is high competition and it is critical to be able to suggest why a given service is different and better than that of competing services.

Second, there is a strong challenge to find new products or services that will replace those which are in a declining stage and must be redeveloped or dropped. Products which have been allowed to decline for too long a time pose serious problems for redevelopment. Attempting to redevelop a given product or to make it more desirable and/or attractive may not only be unsuccessful, but may act as a drag upon the viability of other products or services.

These two challenges are, I believe, very relevant to the state of counseling and human services as we know them today. It would appear that in many areas counseling is in a maturity stage, even approaching a decline. It is not hard to find examples. School counseling in some school districts has been identified as too costly and too ineffective and a variety of alternatives have been suggested. College level counseling centers have, in some institutions, emerged as in the declining stage of the life cycle because of their presumed attention to too few concerns and too few students. Numerous other examples could be identified. The point is that counseling and its services may be in different life cycle stages. What is critical is that we identify the particular stage that each service is in and then develop an appropriate and relevant marketing strategy for it.

The Use of Marketing Concepts in Counseling and the Human Services

As broad social changes take place, it is important that we be able to respond to and reflect those societal demands and needs in our counseling services. We may either do it in a proactive way, demonstrating our viability and desire to meet people's needs and interests, or continue to resist the life cycles of our products and services, thereby risking abandonment and extinction because of declining usage. I

believe there a number of forces placing the human services in an increasingly competitive and vulnerable position; the stronger and more important ones among them are described below.

1. Self-help Books

   There has been a revolution in the publishing industry with the hard and soft-cover publications of the self-help variety. These books offer the reader the knowledge and skills to deal with a vast array of life problems (e.g., managing your own finances, writing your own will, conducting your own divorce, improving your willpower, improving your earning power). They range from systematic and highly organized, self-managed learning modules to brief paperbacks that deal more in euphemisms than in activities. They have won a strong response in the marketplace by people who find professional specialists too expensive or ineffective or both. Developing one's own expertise to respond to life's problems and challenges is becoming a common response in our society. For many people, the response to any life problem or concern is first to deal with it individually, resorting to a specialist or professional only when absolutely necessary. Needless to say, this affects not only the number of requests and referrals but also the type of client.

2. Self-help Networks

   Allied to but still distinct from the books revolution is the development of support networks, either highly structured or informal, that help people deal both cognitively and affectively with their problems and concerns. Particularly in the larger population centers, support networks have become a way of life. In many areas of human problems, such as divorce, job loss, emotional trauma or grief, the support group has become the treatment of choice. Sometimes presided over by a professional helper, or in some cases by peer leaders, these groups are having a powerful influence on the use of professional helping services.

3. Entry of Other Helping Services into Areas Previously Offered by Other Groups

As is true within the commercial marketplace, where a service or product declines with one population and moves on to new areas of potential use, in the helping services field, social workers are entering areas once the domain of school counselors, and profit-making helping services are moving into fields typically the concern of educational institutions. Particularly in the domain of adult developing and learning, this trend is very stronger and likely to become more important in the future.

4. Availability of Computer and Other Technologically Based Helping Services

The development of computer-assisted career counseling programs, plus a rapidly expanding body of self-help computer software, has provided clients with new options for where and how they receive help in making career plans and decisions and resolving personal/social problems. Though the more reputable programs stress the need for the supporting services of competent counselors, it is clear that many adopters see computers and video technology as diminishing if not eliminating the need for human counseling interventions. It is likely that the future will see a great increase in the number of self-help and personal growth programs which provide the client with the opportunity for "comparison shopping" before deciding where to obtain help.

These challenges to traditional counseling and human services programs and practices do not include all the competitors to our profession. Local conditions will frequently reveal other sources of competition which can be extremely strong and exert even greater influence on existing counseling services, whether they will grow and become stronger, or weaken to the point of becoming a tertiary service or even of being abandoned.

Marketing Strategies

A useful way to visualize marketing potentialities and strategies is to organize services and users into a 2 X 2 matrix (Figure II). The first cell, Old

Figure II

Services and Users Matrix

Old Services, Old Users (1)	New Services, Old Users (2)
Old Services, New Users (3)	New Services, New Users (4)

Services and Old Users, is the traditional approach. It says in effect, "stay with what you know best, do what you have been successful doing in the past." This approach implies a long life cycle and, since it involves doing nothing new, is in one sense the safest. From another perspective, it can be dangerous by lulling providers into "business as usual" as the formula of success. However, along the product life cycle there does come a time when a change must be made (e.g., Volkswagon Beetle and previous stability may both obscure the need for change and make it difficult).

The second cell, New Services, Old Users, is the next safest approach. The risk in bringing out new services is minimized because of the knowledge of the users. If you know who your users are, you are able to couch and present new services in ways that are responsive to the needs and interests of your users. Since you know them and they know you, the confidence and trust built up over previous years eases the transition to adopting and using a new service.

The third cell, Old Services, New Users, is a difficult area because you lack experience in dealing with the users, hence are not aware of their characteristics, needs, and interests. Your communications to them may go awry because you emphasize the service rather than focus on how the service/product can be helpful and useful to them.

The fourth cell, New Services, New Users, is the most difficult area of all because you lack knowledge of the users' experience with the product. This "double whammy" helps to explain why so many new products are so unsuccessful and short-

lived. The total unfamiliarity with both variables may lead to major goofs that familiarity with either the product or users would have prevented.

Major Relevant Marketing Concepts

In seeking to apply marketing concepts to counseling, it may be helpful to select the major ideas that offer the most promise for strengthening counseling in the human services.

1. It is crucial in a marketing approach to know your audience and potential consumers and their needs. Generalized assumptions or impressions are an inadequate basis on which to make important marketing decisions. It is absolutely crucial that a regular program be undertaken to assess the nature of your publics and their interests and needs.
2. Product myopia occurs when an organization focuses on the product or service rather than on the needs that the product or service addresses. This concept is very akin to organizations or professionals who continue to do what it is they do well, rather than what it is the public needs or wants. Perhaps the best illustration of this from the counseling field is the continual high priority that helping professionals give to individual or personal counseling, while the public, whether students, adults or other clients, consistently gives it a low priority. Perhaps more than most factors, product myopia leads to the decline of an organization because of the continual inward focus, rather than an outward focus which will lead an organization to identify systematically the new needs and interests of their potential users and consumers. The introduction of new products and services is a crucial responsibility of all organizations. This process is likely to be costly and difficult. It has been suggested that a successful new product or service will result from every seven ideas. It is predictable that the majority of new ideas will be unsuccessful. Hence, an organization must be prepared to experiment and try out new ideas and practices and expect that the majority of them will fail.
3. The success of organizations in developing new products and services appears to be a function not of the amount of money put into research and development, but rather of managerial skills and expertise in marketing programs and services. Another way of saying this is that

throwing dollars at problems or areas of need is not a "sure-fire" way to be successful. The common answer to why a counseling program is not working is that more money, resources and staff are needed, but the answer may really be that the program needs to be better mananged, with a clear delineation of the real needs and interests of the publics who are being served.

4. The single most important factor contributing to new product service success is product uniqueness and superiority. The competition for services now offered by counselors demands a response from them that identifies how their service is unique and why it is superior to the others. Generally, in counseling, we have ignored the factors of uniqueness and superiority. Is it because we feel we do not have a unique service, or that we are superior in the way we respond compared to other providers? I think the answer is that we need to clearly respond if we are going to deal more adequately with our current product cycle and the competition we have been experiencing.
5. It is important from a marketing standpoint that we use the service life cycle in anticipating and planning for both problems and opportunities. Those organizations which have been the most successful over long periods have done so by continuing to upgrade their product offerings to meet new and changing needs. It is absolutely crucial to counseling that we continue at look to changes in our population subgroups that indicate different needs and interests, and to make appropriate changes in how we present, prescribe, and provide counseling. To continue counseling in the same manner as in the 1960s and 1970s is tantamount to resigning ourselves to a decline in the vitality of counseling as a social helping force.
6. Synergistic interface is a concept of combining a stable product or service with new information or a high technology change. This interface extends the life of the stable product and increases the growth of the new change. A clear example of this may be the application of computer-assisted career guidance to career guidance offered through individual counseling and the use of occupational information. Adding technology to career counseling extends the use of career counseling and probably also increases interest and use by new and different groups.

7. A successful marketing plan is geared to developing new markets and new users. This is accomplished particularly by creating new uses: new uses of an existing service, new users of an existing service, and new occasions or reasons for using the service. This emphasis on the new use of the service has many advantages over a new service, in that development and marketing costs are considerably less and the expansion of counseling beyond the crisis or problem orientation is an excellent general approach. Examples of the new use approach could take the form of suggesting that before any major life decision, a person seek counseling assistance, or that an individual seek immediate counseling for a traumatic experience as a means of combating the long-term negative effects.

A Marketing List for Counselors

There are countless things that counselors can adopt to improve the marketing of counseling and human services. A number of these possible actions have the potential to significantly increase public knowledge about and use of counseling services. However, implicit in the marketing approach is the pivotal concern for targeting effort and resources. It is not how much you do, but how well-targeted your efforts are and how effective you are in delivering on your "targets of opportunity." Our goal then is not limited to doing something or being active--it is to judiciously select those concepts and approaches from marketing which have particular cogency and relevance for the human services. What follows are ten specific recommendations and/or actions which are likely to considerably enhance the image that potential publics have of the human services and increase their use of those products and services.

1. **Adopt a positive attitude toward the use of marketing concepts and strategies in more effectively disseminating human services products and services.** Shorn of its advertising tinkle or crass public relations image, marketing concepts are remarkably similar to many of the main-line concepts and principles of human services. It basically is built upon the concept that the product or service that best reflects the needs and interests of potential consumers and responds to them with the highest order of superiority and quality is likely to be the most successful. That is a very compelling concept,

one that has great potential utility for counseling. It is certainly not at odds with current management thinking, which suggests that a management or service orientation stressing excellence in both products and service is a key to success. It is absolutely crucial, therefore, that counselors and human services specialists understand that by the use of marketing concepts they are working to understand their potential clients better and to assist them with making more informed decisions and plans. It is a very legitimate endeavor and can spell the difference between success or failure in human endeavor. In a bottom line sense, it is a way to make helping products and services better.

2. **Define what excellence and quality are in counseling and the human services.** The need here is double-edged. First, counselors need to inform themselves in the clearest possible terms as to what excellence and quality are. Without clear definitions of excellence they will be unable to judge for themselves and to evaluate the effectiveness and success of their individual programmatic efforts. Conversely, if counselors are unable to define for themselves what excellence is, they certainly will be unable to do so for others. Without a scale or basis for making judgments between the good and the bad within the human services, consumers and users are likely to respond to trivia and apparent differences between services, and hence distract the effort of developers and deliverers away from substance to gloss and appearance. The need here is extremely clear. Counselors must know what quality is, and they must be able to communicate what quality and excellence are in terms that are understandable to consumers and users so that they may be able to use it in making decisions to select the best from among the available services.
3. **Respond to competition from other services and sources by promoting the quality and superiority of counseling services.** In the marketplace, it is usually the highest quality product which is the most successful. The numerous examples of the ability of Japanese goods to drive out their competitors demonstrate that even though the pricing of such goods may be the same as their competitors, because their quality is perceived as greater people will choose their product over one of perceived lesser quality. It is incumbent upon human services personnel to respond to competition from

whatever source it comes from by enhancing the quality and the effectiveness of their products and services. Credentialing and licensure and other restrictions on the ease of participation in the service clearly have their part in providing a floor to the quality of a service available to the public. If, however, these restrictions of practice become an act of protectionism or a means to serve the profession's own self-interest, then they are an act of public deception which, in the long run, are harmful to the populace at large and to the professionals who instigate them. The greatest long-term defense of counselors against the intrusion of incompetent and ineffective developers and practitioners is the inferiority and the ineffectiveness of the product of the same and the identifiable superiority in understandable human terms of that which is offered by competent counselors. Competition from other sources may not make our life easier, but it may very well make our services better and in the long run both preserve and promote the viability of counseling as a social force.

4. **Work for the judicious infusion of technology into counseling.** Frequently, the use of a new technology is an effective antidote to a product which is in the maturity or decline stage. The use of technology gives the user a competitive edge over a developer who continues to do things in a traditional and frequently less effective and more expensive way. The greater utilization of technology, such as computers and video discs in counseling, offers the opportunity to do much of what we presently do better and to move into arenas of human assistance which we have been unable to do in the past because of limitations in time and technical capabilities. Potentially, technology offers a promise of both greater individualization of a service for clients and the more effective utilization of the human skills that a counselor brings to a significant human interaction. Counselor acceptance of the effective use of technology may be the ultimate counselor response to the competition posed by essentially artificial and ineffective counseling systems which depend totally upon technology. Skillful use of technology may, as it has in other areas of human endeavor, improve the quality of the phenomenon wherein it is incorporated and lead to improved areas of performance. When used appropriately by the counselor, technology becomes the tool that has been needed to lead to significant improvements in counseling.

5. **Look for niches in consumer needs and interests.** Counselors as a group, whether they be college counseling specialists, school counselors, or agency career specialists, need to be clear on what the areas are where a particular staff and/or counseling program can be most effective. It is not likely that any program which attempts to be all things to all people will ever have much real impact. Targeting what the greatest needs and interests are and responding to those on a priority basis is a far preferable approach than attempting to respond well to every need or interest expressed by a given client or group.
6. **Develop an appropriate marketing strategy for each stage of development.** The decision as to the appropriate marketing strategy to adopt should be guided by the level or stage of development that a given product or service is at. We should not devote all of our efforts to dealing with old products and old users, or to new users and new products. Either strategy would be harmful over a period of time. Rather, we need to identify the level of development of each of the products or services which we have prioritized and develop a strategy which is appropriate given the level of its development. An intermix of strategies with products and services at different stages of development is likely to bring the most positive consumer and user response and also to provide a strong undergirding for program renewal. It will also serve to negate the omnipresent effects of obsolescence. Simply stated, it is a way of avoiding putting all our eggs in one basket in an area where it is extremely difficult to predict what services or products will be needed next.
7. **Make a strong and ongoing commitment toward the research and development of new programs and practices.** Perhaps one reason there has been such steadfast adherence to traditional modes of delivery of counseling and the human services has been the lack of viable alternatives. Being unsure of what options, if any, they had to offerring individual counseling with testing, some counselors have engaged in pitched battles to preserve what they know best. It would seem essential to any organized program effort that part of the time and resources of that unit be devoted to experimental approaches to dealing with client and potential client needs and interests. The greater use of group procedures, the infusion of technologies, expanding outreach services such as networking, and the linkage with self-help programs are just a few of the

potential avenues of renewal and development which offer promise for counselors. Not the least of the means available to counselors is to utilize the power of words. Through the use of information systems and the interactive electronic networks associated with them, such as the ERIC/CAPS Hi-Tech Computer Network, counselors can be exposed to and interact with new ideas and procedures which they can tailor for their own needs and purposes. On both a cost-effectiveness and a cost-benefit basis, the greater use of information systems tied into computer conferencing by counselors offers enormous promise and rewards.

8. **Maximize the building of synergistic interfaces.** The forementioned sources of competition for counseling services, while clearly a threat or challenge to traditional counseling, may at the same time provide bridges which can be used by innovative programs to increase their synergistic interfaces. By linking and collaborating with other individuals and groups and incorporating new concepts, approaches, and resources into their offerings, counselors can greatly increase the overall power and impact of their interventions with both individuals and groups. These efforts, while perceived by some as dispersing professional contact, are in fact more likely to increase the potency of the counselor's ability to work with and be of assistance to large numbers of clients with different needs and interests.
9. **Regularly and systematically assess user and potential user needs and interests.** It is easy for human services personnel to become convinced that they are aware of and know all they need to know about the needs and interests of the clients they serve. They become experts in their own mind on what they should do and in what ways and with what emphasis. Such an approach denies the difficulties inherent in making judgments about the needs and interests of any consumer or client group--judgments that require systematic assessment and programs and services based on the responses to that assessment. Programs which rely on unsystematic observations of their own specialists run the strong risk of focusing inward rather than outward, and of doing what the specialists desire to do rather than what their clients and consumers need. Almost as importantly, the systematic assessment of user needs and interests becomes an important source of information to share with funders and decision makers to document and validate that the program is clearly responsive to the needs of the populace which they serve.

10. **Act decisively to terminate unhealthy and ineffective products and services.** Like products, services have their own life cycle. They may be short-lived or of very long duration. Of course, longevity is partially determined by the degree to which the offerers take decisive action during the growth and maturity stages to insure the viability of the product or service. However, almost all products and services reach a time when their usefulness or utility no longer justifies their continuance. This is a point when counselors should be prepared to take decisive action to terminate a given service or product, e.g., a counseling offering or product such as testing or career information. Efforts to justify or to continue offering a service which is no longer needed or desired by clients can prove to be extremely costly to the sponsoring organization, in terms of both the image they present to their user publics and the staff and financial resources necessary to keep the service or product alive. A real measure of quality assurance is the amount of discard which is present in a product or service. Counselors need to be committed to a regular and systematic discard of practices and procedures which have outlived their usefulness and need to be replaced by more meaningful and effective options.

Conclusion

Traditionally, counselors have functioned with little regard for how their potential clients perceived them or for the means they used to inform potential users of the benefits of counseling. There seems to have been an implicit assumption that inevitably the "truth" about the value of counseling would prevail and that its users and supporters would progressively increase. To the contrary, six or seven decades after its beginnings, counseling is struggling to gain the understanding and acceptance of its potential publics. Now more than ever before it is essential that counselors recognize and accept the responsibility to market their services. The alternative is to allow services of lesser quality or utility to prosper while counseling withers in the shade of their more astutely marketed competitors.